

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 00782

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TAGS: PINT, PFOR, UK, EI
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: LYNCH STATEMENTS AND
COLLAPSE OF ULSTER TALKS

REF: LONDON 372

SUMMARY: IRISH PM JACK LYNCH'S REMARKS ON NORTHERN IRELAND HAVE RAISED QUESTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF HMG-GOI COOPERATION ON ULSTER AND THE STATUS OF ULSTER SECRETARY ROY MASON'S TALKS ON POLITICAL DEVOLUTION FOR THE PROVINCE. MASON'S STRONGLY WORDED STATEMENT ON MONDAY REACTING TO THE LYNCH REMARKS WAS FOLLOWED BY MORE CONCILIATORY AND OPTIMISTIC REMARKS AT QUESTION TIME ON THURSDAY AS HMG ATTEMPTED TO MINIMIZE THE DAMAGE DONE. MASON ALSO REVEALED FURTHER DETAILS OF HIS PLAN FOR AN INTERIM DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT IN ULSTER. THE OUT-LOOK FOR PROGRESS REMAINS DOUBTFUL, HOWEVER, AS THE LYNCH REMARKS HAVE PROVIDED THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE NI PARTIES TO WITHDRAW FROM DISCUSSIONS WITH THE NIO. END SUMMARY.

1. IN THE WEEK FOLLOWING IRISH PM JACK LYNCH'S NOW-FAMOUS REMARKS ON NORTHERN IRELAND (REFTEL), HMG HAS
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ATTEMPTED TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT AND CONTINUE THE POLICY OF POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PARTIES IN ULSTER. LYNCH'S STATEMENTS URGING HMG TO DECLARE ITS ULTIMATE INTENT TO WITHDRAW FROM NI AND INDICATING THAT THE GOI MIGHT CONSIDER EVENTUAL AMNESTY FOR CONVICTED TORISTS AFTER VIOLENCE ENDS IN THE PROVINCE, BROUGHT A STRONG REACTION FROM NI SECRETARY ROY MASON ON MONDAY. MASON

REAFFIRMED HMG'S INTENT TO REMAIN IN NI AS LONG AS A MAJORITY OF THE NI PEOPLE WISHED TO REMAIN PART OF THE UK, AND REJECTED ANY NOTION OF AMNESTY IN HIS RESPONSE TO LYNCH'S "UNHELPFUL COMMENTS". IN ADDITION, FCO MINISTER OF STATE FRANK JUDD CALLED IRISH AMBASSADOR KEATING TO ASK FOR AN EXPLANATION OF THE IRISH PM'S REMARKS.

2. ACCORDING TO FCO SOURCES, KEATING EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT THE BRITISH REACTION TO LYNCH'S REMARKS AND SAID THAT LYNCH HAD MERELY RESTATED HIS GOVERNMENT'S EARLIER POLICY, POINTS CARRIED FURTHER IN LYNCH'S LATER PUBLIC-RESPONSE TO MASON. WHILE FCO AND NIO SOURCES REFRAINED FROM ANY SUGGESTION THAT LYNCH HAD DONE IRREPARABLE DAMAGE TO HMG-GOI COOPERATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND TO THE ULSTER TALKS, THEY EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT LYNCH'S ACTION AND SOME BEWILDERMENT OVER LYNCH'S MOTIVES. NIO OFFICIALS DID OFFER THE VIEW THAT THE IRISH PREMIER'S REMARKS WERE NOT CASUALLY AND INADVERTENTLY MADE. THEY SUGGESTED PRIVATELY, AS DID MASON PUBLICLY IN QUESTION TIME ON THURSDAY, THAT LYNCH HAD CAREFULLY PLANNED HIS STATEMENT.

3. THESE SOURCES INDICATED THAT HMG WOULD TAKE A "BUSINESS AS USUAL" APPROACH AND THAT PRESUMABLY HMG-GOI COOPERATION ON SECURITY MATTERS AND CURRENT DISCUSSIONS ON CROSS-BORDER ECONOMIC ISSUES WOULD CONTINUE IN A SPIRIT OF CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS. ONE NIO OFFICIAL OFFERED THE VIEW THAT HMG COULD HAVE ACCOMMODATED A LYNCH STATEMENT ON THE REUNIFICATION ISSUE ALONE, BUT THE ABSENCE OF ANY PRIOR WARNING AND THE MENTION OF THE AMNESTY ISSUE WOULD MAKE IT DIFFICULT

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ATIONS ON CROSS-BORDER ECONOMIC ISSUES WOULD CONTINUE IN A SPIRIT OF CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS. ONE NIO OFFICIAL OFFERED THE VIEW THAT HMG COULD HAVE ACCOMMODATED A LYNCH STATEMENT ON THE REUNIFICATION ISSUE ALONE, BUT THE ABSENCE OF ANY PRIOR WARNING AND THE MENTION OF THE AMNESTY ISSUE WOULD MAKE IT DIFFICULT

4. AT QUESTION TIME ON THURSDAY, MASON CALMLY ATTEMPTED TO MINIMIZE THE INCIDENT. WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THE IRISH PM'S STATEMENT HAD "CAUSED MANY REVERBERATIONS INSIDE THE REPUBLIC, ULSTER AND THE UK", HE STATED THAT LYNCH'S SECOND STATEMENT HAD REMOVED THE AMBIGUITIES REGARDING AMNESTY AND THAT HMG DID NOT THINK IT NECESSARY TO ASK THE GOI FOR A FORMAL EXPLANATION.

5. AIREY NEAVE, THE CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN ON NI, AND OTHER MP'S USED THE OCCASION TO VOICE THEIR COMPLAINTS ABOUT LYNCH'S "INTERVENTION" IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE PROVINCE. NEAVE, FOLLOWING UP HIS CRITICISM OF LYNCH EARLIER IN THE WEEK, ACCUSED HIM OF A "GREAT BREACH

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IN DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE". CONSERVATIVE MP WILLIAM VAN STRAUBENZEE, A FORMER ULSTER MINISTER, TOLD THE HOUSE THAT LYNCH DEMONSTRATED "ALL THE FINESSE OF AN EDUCATIONALLY SUBNORMAL ELEPHANT". ULSTER UNIONIST MP JAMES MOLYNEAUX CHARGED THAT LYNCH HAD OFFERED "IRRESPONSIBLE ENCOURAGEMENT" TO IRA TERRORISTS IN ULSTER.

6. MASON URGED US PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND AT A PUBLIC ADDRESS BEFORE THE AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN LONDON ON THE DAY BEFORE QUESTION TIME. HE SAID ALSO IN REPLY TO PRESS QUESTIONS THAT HMG WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK TO ESTABLISH A DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATION IN NI WITH "REAL POWERS". MASON CAREFULLY AVOIDED THE TERM "POWER-SHARING" IN ANY REFERENCES TO THIS DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATION, STATING RATHER THAT IT WOULD BE ONE "IN WHICH ALL SECTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY COULD PARTICIPATE ON A FAIR BASIS AND IN WHICH THE RIGHTS OF ALL CITIZENS WERE SAFEGUARDED." IN CONVERSATION WITH THE DCM, MASON STATED THAT HMG, REGARDLESS OF LYNCH, WOULD PLAN TO TRY TO CONTINUE THE TALKS. HE OFFERED THE FOLLOWING OUTLINE
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OF THE NIO'S OBJECTIVES: (1) THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ASSEMBLY OF 78 MEMBERS AND (2) THE CREATION OF 11 COMMITTEES, EACH RESPONSIBLE FOR ADMINISTERING A NI DEPARTMENT. THE CHAIRMEN OF THESE COMMITTEES WOULD BE ALLOCATED AMONG THE ULSTER PARTIES (ACCORDING TO THEIR POPULAR STRENGTH) AS FOLLOWS: UNIONISTS - 4, SDLP - 3, DUP - 2, ALLIANCE - 2. THIS "PARTNERSHIP ADMINISTRATION," WITHOUT A CENTRAL EXECUTIVE ENTITY WOULD PROVIDE A VIABLE NEXT STEP TOWARD ALLOCATING "REAL POWERS."

7. BY WEEK'S END, IT WAS CLEAR THAT WHATEVER HOPE MASON HAD OF CONTINUING HIS DIALOGUE WITH THE NI PARTIES, LYNCH'S REMARKS HAD PROVIDED THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE UNIONISTS TO WITHDRAW FROM THE TALKS WHICH, IN TURN, ALLOWED THE SDLP TO DISENGAGE WITHOUT APPEARING TO BE THE FIRST TO GO. THE UNIONISTS CHARGED THAT MASON HAD NOT REASSURED THEM THAT POWER-SHARING WAS NOT A PREREQUISITE FOR A DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT IN ULSTER. SUCH ASSURANCES WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE SDLP, WHICH AT ANY RATE, HAD CONTEMPLATED WITHDRAWING FROM THE TALKS BEFORE THE LYNCH AFFAIR. WITH THE PAISLEYITE DUP

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ALSO COMMITTED TO WITHDRAWING FROM THE CURRENT ROUND OF TALKS, MASON'S CURRENT INITIATIVE APPEARS FINISHED DESPITE HIS HOPEFUL PUBLIC STATEMENTS.

8. COMMENT: WHILE MASON AND OTHER HMG OFFICIALS TRY TO MINIMIZE THE EFFECT OF LYNCH'S REMARKS, THE CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HMG AND GOI BELIEVE HAD EXISTED PREVIOUSLY HAS UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN UNDERMINED. THE ABSENCE OF ANY PRIOR WARNING, THE APPARENT PREPARED NATURE OF THE REMARKS, AND THE MENTION OF AMNESTY HAVE UNSETTLED HMG'S EFFORTS TO CONTINUE DOWN THE LONG ROAD OF POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION IN ULSTER. PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE IS THE MENTION OF AMNESTY WHICH DREW REACTIONS FROM UK PUBLIC FIGURES RANGING FROM "UNHELPFUL" TO BEING IN DIRECT SUPPORT TO THE IRA TERRORISTS WHOSE LATEST INCENDIARY CAMPAIGN IN BELFAST COINCIDED WITH LYNCH'S PUBLIC STATEMENT.

9. WHILE FURTHER DETAILS OF MASON'S SCHEME FOR ADMINISTRATIVE DEVOLUTION IN NI HAVE BEEN ENLIGHTENING, WE HOLD OUT LITTLE HOPE FOR THE PROSPECT OF NIO CONTINUING FRUIT
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FUL DISCUSSIONS WITH THE ULSTER PARTIES IN THE NEAR FUTURE. MASON AND THE NIO WILL SEEK A RESUMPTION OF THE TALKS, BUT THE PUBLIC RHETORIC WHICH CAME FORTH DURING THE WEEK MAY HAVE HAD THE EFFECT OF REINFORCING THE SEEMINGLY IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE UNIONISTS AND THE SDLP. WHATEVER LYNCH'S MOTIVES MIGHT HAVE BEEN, HIS REMARKS SEEM TO HAVE PROVIDED THE OPPORTUNITY TO CALL A HALT TO THE POKER GAME IN BELFAST-- WHICH SEEMED TO BE THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN.

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